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**Through an Australian Lens:
Explorations of India in Jane Campion's *Holy Smoke!***

Lisa French

Introduction

In the half-light, a black man's hand strokes Ruth's neck. She flicks him away like an insect, oblivious to the sensual energy she radiates. This is how filmmaker Jane Campion introduces Ruth (Kate Winslet), the central character of her 1999 film, *Holy Smoke!* This opening scene, of Ruth on a bus, amidst the colour and vigour of a busy Indian city, can be read not only as representing an experience common to Western women abroad in South East Asia,¹ but also as emphasizing that Ruth is a luminous and irresistible beauty. This chapter begins by outlining the role India plays in *Holy Smoke!* (the film, and the novel of the same name); then there is an overview of what makes this an Australian film (despite being made with international stars and money); followed by a discussion of how Campion uses the luminousness of this central character in her film to explore (Western) female experience²; and finally, an examination of how the film explores ideas of how men and women might exist together in the world—or, what it is to be human.

Jane Campion was apparently inspired to make a film in India following a trip there (Polan 142), and both the film and the novel of *Holy Smoke!* were released in 1999. The novel is a joint project between Jane Campion and her sister, Anna Campion, and the film is directed by Jane, and co-written by both of them. Although structured differently, the story of the film and the book are the same. An Australian woman, Ruth, backpacks through India with her friend Prue. In New Delhi, she finds herself drawn to an ashram and decides not to return to Australia because she has found "truth" and the meaning of life. Prue returns home to tell Ruth's parents that a guru has indoctrinated her. The family fly into a panic³ and lure Ruth

back to Australia to a waiting “cult-exiter”—the American PJ (Harvey Keitel)—and the majority of the film, and the book, centre on this latter event.

Exploring India

While the film begins in India, the novel begins with the “cult-exiting,” and early in the book Ruth explains what had occurred in the past tense,

We’d travelled to India [. . .] we didn’t really know why we were going, we could have gone to many places. Anywhere that wasn’t known. Our knowledge was zero—pathetic as you’d expect. Taj Mahal, saris, elephants, [. . .] no one persecuting you. Indians don’t get on your case, they don’t judge you, they judge themselves, self-depreciating [. . .]. (Campion 13)

While Ruth is critical of her initial contact, and this brings forth the notion of Westerner travellers seeking the exotic, or salvation (stereotypes of places in the East), Campion’s film does not explore India. The film represents India as an imagined place, a hippy utopia of the 1970s, and despite an opening scene that evocatively captures the look and feel of the place, it is not represented in a serious way that attempts to offer anything that allows insight or understanding of the complex country India is. It is a tourist’s eye that sees it in *Holy Smoke!* and thus, the song of love, belief, and miracles that features in the opening of the film, Neil Diamond’s *Holy Holy* (1969), perfectly captures the stereotype, the 1970s ambiance, and the themes of the film. The smoke of the film and book’s title evokes not just India’s temperature, but Ruth’s luminousness—her heat—she is “hot” (to be “hot” comes from the idea of being on heat, and denotes that she gives off, or is charged with heat in terms of her sexuality. Colloquially, it refers to the arousing of interest by others in the “hot” person, and is slang for sexual excitement or strong sexual desire). But it is also about a spiritual search for the fire of the soul, and perhaps also, about relationships—as Kathleen Murphy (2000) suggests, “falling in love (with a guru, God, or guy) might have somewhat to do with smoke getting in your eyes” (30)—as Louis Armstrong also noted in his song *Smoke gets in your eyes*, that is what happens, love is blind “when your heart’s on fire”.

While India itself does not receive any serious treatment, there is however a respect for the values or ideals that India represents (to the West). What the film and book do is to use India as a metaphor for different ways of thinking—particularly about spirituality. Campion has said, “I’m hoping that [. . .] the film will open up a line of inquiry about ways of Western thinking” (qtd. in Murphy 30) and that she is “not really fascinated by cults, but I am interested in the question of how you have a spiritual life in the 90s and in the connections of

spirituality, eroticism, and love” (qtd. in Taubin 138). Critic Kate Pullinger (1999) has described *Holy Smoke!* as centring on “the contradictions and complications of spirituality, a timely commentary on the West’s continual misappropriation of eastern mysticism” (10). While it could be argued that Campion misappropriates eastern mysticism herself, it is however true that spirituality is a reoccurring theme throughout Campion’s work from the beginning of her feature career.⁴



An image that connects with both India and spirituality is towards the end of the film where PJ lies prostrate in the desert, hallucinating and having a vision of Ruth as a six-armed goddess. The Hindu iconography signifies India, as does the abrupt change in aesthetic—reminiscent of the spectacular qualities of Bollywood (particularly the saturated colour). This is more than his view of her, or any decorative reference to the many six armed goddesses in the Hindu religion; it is a signifier of how luminous and magnificent she is. This is evident if one considers what these goddesses themselves signify. While there isn’t any research indicating whether Campion was referencing any particular deity, the goddess that comes to mind is Rati, the Hindu/Balinese “goddess of desire” (Davies and Dowson 146)—also known as Mayavati or Reva. Rati rules sexual desire, lust, love, and sexual passions but also regeneration, revenge, fear, dark magic; and she is a protector of women. The myth tells that after a battle, “the gods, led by Kama-deva’s wife, Rati implored Tripura-Sundari to restore the god of love, whom Siva had destroyed. She does so, and desire is restored to the world” (Kinsley 116-117):

“What have you done?” cried Rati [. . .]. Without desire, the bull will forsake the cow, the horse, the mare and the bees, the flowers. There will be no homes, no families, for men and women will not love each other. Society will collapse and life will be devoid of its very essence. Desire may be the cause of suffering; but it is also the reason behind joy. What is life without it? An existence without flavour. So there is suffering. What is so terrible about that? After suffering, joy is bound to return. (“Parvati, the Mother Goddess”)

Coupled with the idea of Ruth's luminousness (which I discuss and describe below as "girlshine"), the vision of Ruth as a goddess links the two ideas, that desire and sexual passion are necessary for the natural order of things, but more particularly, this goddess is about the idea of painful humiliation leading to joy and enlightenment—an important theme of the film and book (as discussed further on). Gods and goddesses have shadow aspects (in the Jungian sense); like archetypes, they have multiple shades, both positive and negative. The reference underlines the complexity, or duality of identity, and the epic journey of coming to know one's self and others—another central investigation of *Holy Smoke!*

An Australian Lens

Jane Campion's filmmaking career has for some years been international in reputation and scope. Born in New Zealand, Campion trained as a filmmaker at the AFTS (now called The Australian, Film, Television and Radio School—AFTRS) in Sydney. She now lives and works from an Australian base, and has "called herself an 'Aussie directress' " (Rueschmann 9). While some of her films are more directly linked to New Zealand—*An Angel at My Table* (1990) and *The Piano* (1993), others engage in a dialogue with Australia—*Sweetie* (1989) and *Holy Smoke!* (1999). However, she is a "transnational" filmmaker because she can work across a range of industrial contexts, and attract international money and talent. She is one of a handful of women who have been able to work continually in features in both Australia and internationally, including in Hollywood. It is important for Australian filmmakers that they are transnational, not just because there is a small local market, but because cinema is a global industry—national cinema is also international. However, while being transnational, *Holy Smoke!* is also strongly inflected with a sense of Australia as a place and draws on Australian cinema itself as a referent.

The link to Australian cinema is no more evident than in the characters of the family at the centre of *Holy Smoke!* They are a significant reason why the film has been described (see Hall 12) as having been compiled from off-cuts from Stephan Elliot's *The Adventures of Pricilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994) and Rob Sitch's *The Castle* (1997). This is partly characterization,⁵ and partly that some actors appear in other films of the 1990s; for instance, Ruth's brother, Robbie (Daniel Wyllie) is a family member in Paul J. Hogan's *Muriel's Wedding* (1994). His presence works intertextually to signify some themes of both *Muriel's Wedding* and *Holy Smoke!*—such as dysfunctional families and the search for identity—particularly the idea of being yourself, a theme that is was prevalent in Australian cinema from the mid 1990s. This is particularly true of the successful "glitter cycle" films of

the decade prior to Baz Luhrmann's *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), *Muriel's Wedding*, and *The Adventures of Pricilla*, *Holy Smoke!* also shares a sense of the bizarre that many of the glitter cycle films champion, for example, when the Barron family gather in the lounge room, a sheep casually wanders around with snack food placed on its back. The characters in *Holy Smoke!* intertextually reference characters from other Australian films. They reference them as pastiche—for example, the bizarre visual spectacle of a car with reindeer antlers speeding across the red landscape (shades of *The Adventures of Pricilla*, *Queen of the Desert* and the silver figure on top of a bus)—and also, enter a postmodern dialogue with these figures of Australian cinema (for example, the character “type” played by Sophie Lee as Yvonne).



The casting of Sophie Lee in *Holy Smoke!* is important because it creates an intertextual link and dialogue with the typecast roles Lee has played in a number of very successful Australian films. Lee plays the same character “type” in *Holy Smoke!* as she does in several other films that were released in the period in which *Holy Smoke!* was in development and pre-production: *Muriel's Wedding*, *The Castle* and Robert Luketic's short film *Titsiana Booberini* (1997). Lee's character Tracy in *The Castle* is an affectionate portrayal, but in *Muriel's Wedding* and *Titsiana Booberini*, Lee clearly plays characters that are foils, particular comic “types” set up for ridicule: the self-obsessed, vain, and highly sexual young woman. This is exemplified by Tania Degano in *Muriel's Wedding*. When not getting her way Tania says in disbelief, “but I'm beautiful!” This is in marked contrast to Campion's representation in *Holy Smoke!* which is filled with empathy for Yvonne's plight as a housewife and mother who is trapped in a very ordinary domesticity. While still a young woman, she is starting to realise that her dreams of what her life will be are not going to be fulfilled. Campion recognizes how Yvonne's hopes for life have left her disappointed and she functions in the film to offer the specifically female subjectivity of a woman whose luminous first flush of youthful beauty has passed, and who is wondering what happened to all her hopes and dreams of romance and intimacy. She presents as someone cognizant of this passing, but not having come to terms

with it. She is sad, fearful, and emotionally needy and Campion offers both a particularly empathetic female view of this character type and another way of understanding her.

An example of how sad, fearful and needy Yvonne is can be seen in the scene where she comes to the halfway hut to bring clothes for Ruth. She meets PJ at the gate and tells a story of how Robbie thinks she is having an affair because he has found love letters addressed to her. Yvonne confesses that she wrote them herself and that she finds them romantic and beautiful. This is a poignant moment where Campion exposes Yvonne's pain, disappointment and neediness. However PJ, and then Yvonne laugh—illustrating that PJ is unable, and uninterested in Yvonne's call for help—a plea she makes more than once in the film, and which is left unanswered. Yvonne has oral sex with PJ, and later, in an echo of this scene, Ruth accuses PJ of being interested in particular kinds of “Barbie Doll” women and of having a hatred of women. He says that he doesn't hate “ladies,” causing Ruth to scoff at his use of “ladies” (gender) instead of women (sex). This scene reveals his construction of gender, and how they filter how he is able to understand and interact with women. Following this exchange, PJ accuses Ruth of extracting the “ultimate revenge”—against men—by taking her beauty off to the Ashram (as if her beauty rightfully belongs to men).

Another notable way in which *Holy Smoke!* is particularly Australian is in its representation of the landscape. The film sets the landscape up as a backdrop without mythologizing it as many films in Australian cinema have.⁶ The outback in *Holy Smoke!* appears as a representation rather than a realistic vision. Ruth drives through it, but it appears very much as a back drop—as it is in other films: such as *The Adventures of Pricilla, Queen of the Desert*, Tracey Moffatt's short film *Night Cries, A Rural Tragedy* (1989) or Alex Proyas' *Spirits of the Air, Gremlins of the Clouds* (1989). This presents both the city and the outback as artificial, and takes up a different urban/rural juxtaposition to that in early Australian film, and films of the revival, because the outback while beautiful, is not a character, and does not have mythic dimensions in *Holy Smoke!* This feature locates it as a film particularly of Australian cinema of the 1990s.

“Girlshine” and Female Experience



Jane Campion has described her central character Ruth as being full of

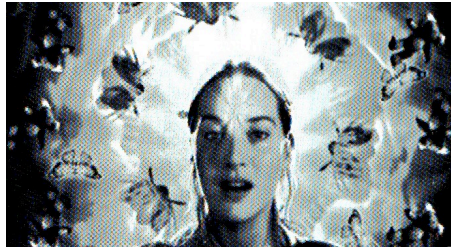
a fascist and fundamental energy. It's elemental, beautiful, transforming, and it's only available for a short period of time. It's a kind of girlshine; as she learns more about life it will be shadowed. That is the nature of growing up.

Holy Smoke! begins in joyous mystery before the shadowing. (qtd. in Murphy 32)

“Girlshine” is a term derived from Campion’s comments (above) and which I have coined as a concept (see French 2007). It refers to the age group 16-21 (or thereabouts), denoting a time when young women experience a particular physical flowering, and have a sense of power without the caution that age and experience impose. It is a brief, transient, and liminal phase. Although women vary in their physical attributes, it is the proposition here that all women (of Campion’s particular Western, socio-economic and historical grouping) go through this period/experience—whether cognizant of it or not—and as such, it is a commonality of female experience.⁷ As I have argued elsewhere,⁸ “girlshine” is a central exploration and the unique examination that *Holy Smoke!* offers in regard to female experience (see French 2007).

All the elements of the film’s production work to underline that Ruth embodies pure sensual energy from the hand that touches her on the bus, through to her arrival at Emu Farm where she blissfully sings and dances to Alanis Morissette’s “You Oughta Know” from *Jagged Little Pill* (1995). The song “celebrates a young woman’s life force, her soul. It’s a mantra. One can be on an amazing journey, while others are oblivious even to the possibility” (Campion qtd. in Murphy 32).⁹ Anthropologist Piya Chatterjee has observed that it is no accident that Campion mines a tradition (which Chatterjee describes as Indian), “that from the beginning has seen spirituality and sexuality as completely entwined and has revered and, more significantly, feared the power of the female principle and female sexuality” (qtd. in McHugh 2001). This idea of entwined sexuality where a woman’s art, body and sexuality have been described as entangled is not just linked to India, but also has a connection to Campion’s other films; for example Janet Frame, the writer in *An Angel at my Table*, and the singing Sweetie, in *Sweetie*.¹⁰

Female *Jouissance*



Ruth encounters the guru in *Holy Smoke!* in a scene where his touch leaves her with a third eye and light streaming from her forehead. Hilary Neroni (2004) describes this as a moment of female eroticism, and the spectacle of Baba's touch as female *jouissance*—a concept which is linked to sexual, spiritual, physical or conceptual joy or ecstasy.¹¹ *Holy Smoke!* thus foregrounds female experience of corporeality, and also enjoyment. It is however not Ruth's emotional trajectory, but the reaction of the other characters that is significant in the film, especially (as Neroni has observed) to her moments of *jouissance* (Neroni 219). It is how Ruth affects those around her that the film explores and this is an example of how Campion's films are structurally different to conventional Hollywood. Instead of working towards the character's desire throughout the whole film, Campion stages Ruth's desire, and her *jouissance*, for the audience up front. Campion is

less concerned with following the path of desire than with dwelling in a particular experience and the web of relationships that are connected to that experience [. . .] how it disrupts and reconfigures the surrounding social reality. (Neroni 217)¹²

This is in contrast to conventional narratives which build to a resolution, that while appearing to be the ultimate satisfaction, does not have to explore the effectiveness, or ultimate strength/failure, of the conclusion. In conventional storytelling, the “happy ever after” of the fairytale is never interrogated, so the ultimate satisfaction of the conclusion or the underlying ideology it masks, is left unquestioned. At the end of Campion's films we are left with many questions about the future of the central protagonists but a certain “happy ever after” is never confirmed—although the characters hold out the promise of their own resourcefulness as a possibility for optimism.

Human Communication: Men and Women in the World



A perplexing scene in *Holy Smoke!* is where Ruth stands naked in front of PJ and urinates. Just as gods and goddesses have a shadow aspect, or a duality, “girlshine” also has an inverse—an “abject” side—as signified in her urinating. While this representation might appear to be at odds with the concept of “girlshine,” it is essentially a reminder that iconic beauty is only surface, and that we are all human.

There are several possible ways of reading this scene. The most evident for those who know Campion’s films, is that women urinating (outside) is a resonant theme from Campion’s early work in her shorts through to her features, including her most lauded film, *The Piano* (1993).¹³ In her short film *Peel: An Exercise in Discipline* (1982), the sister/aunt character (Katie Pye) squats in the grass and urinates by the roadside and in her first feature (*Sweetie*), the character Sweetie (Genevieve Lemon) urinates next to her father’s car. These scenes are linked to the urination scene in *Holy Smoke!* In urinating on herself, Ruth is doing something ostensibly animalistic, although animals avoid doing this by cocking their legs or squatting; however animals seek dominance, or are proprietorial, through urinating or spraying. When female characters urinate in Campion’s films, they are generally involved in power struggles with men. This is reflected when Ruth accuses PJ of wanting young women because he wants to show others what a “beautiful post you got to piss on.”

One way of reading the urination motif is through the lens of Campion’s own comments, which strongly bring to mind that human bodies are abject, to be human is to leak and seep; as Julia Kristeva (1982) has written, the “abject confronts us [. . .] with the fragile states where man wanders in the territories of the *animal* ” (qtd. in Bloom 93). The motif can also be read as an exploration of the concept of the abject across Campion’s films. Kristeva has written that “abjection is above all ambiguity [. . .] abjection acknowledges it [the subject] to be in perpetual danger [. . .] [it is that which] does not respect borders, positions, rules, that which “disturbs identity, system, order’ ” (qtd. in Creed 8). Through the character of Ruth, the act of urinating signifies Campion’s resistance to social and cultural conformity or homogeneity. Thus Campion breaks the taboo in our culture for representing such fluids—confronting the horror of fluids¹⁴—and reminds us that the idea of a sealed and “proper” body is impossibility. PJ tries to cleanse Ruth’s mind with the implication that her body will fall

into line, but his failure to do so challenges the concept of the supremacy of the mind over the body.¹⁵ This spectacle of female will is something that Campion's central protagonists all share,¹⁶ and provides particular identification for female audiences.

It is interesting to note that the abject is also linked to the "gothic"—a form Campion has had an interest in (particularly romantic gothic melodrama¹⁷). According to Gerry Turcotte (1993), the gothic often deals with scatological or "the abject" and it is "a mode that explores borderland positions, which engages with the grotesque, which allows sexes to blur to the point of transformation, and which speaks the supposedly unspeakable remarkably well [. . .]" (132). The gothic is also something that has been present in Australian film from the 1970s, and which also has a place in New Zealand culture.¹⁸

Another way of reading the urination scene is in relation to how it has been critically received. Some critics, such as Phillip Adams (2000), have seen *Holy Smoke!* as man hating. Adams wrote that he could not think of the "versa" of misogyny [which would be misandry] but, if there were such a word, it would be called for in regard to Campion's "apparent detestation of blokes" (32). Adams reads the scene of Ruth urinating—standing like a man—as providing "powerful symbolism of Campion's hostility to the penis-wielding gender" (32). Critic Stanley Kauffman (2000) also implied this when he wrote of PJ that when he wears "the lipstick and red dress that she has put on him - in ridicule of his sexuality" [he does this because he - has accepted that] "he is her slave." "After several more twists, she pities the reduced and now-impotent man" (Kauffman 26), and PJ falls, according to Stuart Klawans (2000), "abjectly for a woman who was supposed to have been his conquest" (35). These accounts reflect the fury and disgust¹⁹ of some critics, and most likely some viewers, but they do not take into account the bond that develops between Ruth and PJ. For example, this is evidenced when Ruth sits in the back of the ute cradling PJ towards the end of the film, and in the final scene they write to each other about their connection and the profound effect they have had on each other.

Campion has been quoted as saying that she feels for men who desire women but for whom this desire is not reciprocated. She says that men "feel completely disempowered in relationship to it [their desire]" (qtd. in Barber 6). While Campion's characterization highlights PJ as self-deluded, chauvinistic and sexually vain, it is the argument of this chapter that she is not trying to demean men. Others have also noted this point, for instance, Dana Polan (2001) has observed that Campion's most recent films involve "an effort to redeem men or at least to find mitigating circumstances for their inadequacies" (41). What Campion is much more interested in is to explore how men and women interact in

the world and how ones gender influences those interactions. For example, Campion has said that the film demonstrates Ruth's awareness of how she is seen and objectified (her "girlshine"):

Ruth has a kind of battle cry [. . .] She acts toward P.J. out of the full force of knowing what it is to be sexually objectified: to only be seen in terms of one's beauty – which is not to be seen at all. This is why she dresses him up in the red dress, so that when he looks at himself he is seeing a woman of his own age, someone sexually undesirable. She wants to appal him with his own double standards. (Campion qtd. in *Holy Smoke!* Press kit)

While he is a man in drag, rather than a woman, his remark that he "was young once and handsome too" and that she would have been "impressed," indicates that he is making the connection Campion describes. She forces him to face the fact that his own beauty has passed—perhaps that the testosterone driven days of his own boyshine" are long gone—he admits, "I'm a dirty old man."

PJ's defence has been seen by critics such as Kate Pullinger, as a mediation or attack on the ludicrous Hollywood convention of pairing old men with young women, writing that "Ruth doesn't go for PJ because he is powerful and authoritative and fatherly; she goes for him because she has spotted his Achilles heel – he is unable to control his libido. The moment Ruth sees this, he is lost" (Pullinger 10). While this describes what occurs, it also fails to notice that he enlightens her in regard to her own state, which she comes to see and understand through her interaction with him.

David Stratton (1999) wrote that once PJ has sex with Ruth, "this proves to be his undoing [. . .] [she] demolishes the vanity of her tormentor and, in the process, negates his power" (14). This negation of power may be a crucial objection to the film for those wanting the myth of the male seducer to be maintained. PJ loses his symbolic identity, the power of that identity is dissipated, and the social order threatened; his loss of power is both as a man (in the sense he has understood his masculinity until this point), and an exit therapist (the surrogate god/guru). This demonstrates a way in which Campion's cinema deconstructs the dominant paradigms. Conventional cinema represents women as "a mystery for him [the man] to master and decipher within safe or unthreatening borders" (Grosz, 1994: 191), but Campion's films do not represent or allow this journey because Campion creates a threatening representation. Her film is without masculinist privilege in the sense that it does not favour the male symbolic and devalue the female symbolic—as feminist writers such as Kristeva have

argued that society and culture has traditionally done. It is possibly this that unsettles, threatens, or enrages some (particularly male) critics.²⁰

There are other (largely female) critics who have an alternate view to Adams, Klawans and Kauffman. Ruth Hessey (2000) has observed that Campion's investigation offers us a position that "humiliation, though painful, can lead to enlightenment" (8); for example, the wearing of a dress signifies humiliation given that PJ remarks that Baba (the guru) wears a dress, and therefore, a link between them is signified when PJ wears one—especially given that early in the film PJ has dismissed Baba because "he wears a dress." Hessey also says "Ruth subjects PJ to a humiliation so total it represents what every man probably fears when he lets a woman get on top" (2000: 8). However, Campion says "[h]umiliation is an important part of the process" [. . .] "Humiliation of the ego can be a very positive thing" (Campion qtd. in Hessey, 2000: 34).

Holy Smoke! is focused on, and offers a profound insight into the foibles and failings of humans, and what they might become through their interactions and experience of/with each other. In her review of *Holy Smoke!* Stella Bruzzi (2000) observed that "it is essentially a film about the tenuousness of most people's sense of self—our decentredness, our malleability, our vulnerability in the face of our own desires and the manipulative skills of others" (48). Campion explores this development of a sense of self, and the unequal power in human relationships, and is quoted as saying that what she was interested in developing, and what interests her is that Ruth and PJ

fundamentally alter each other. . . . even married couples, might never have such an intimate or naked experience as these two share. I admire them for the courage to stay in dialogue with each other however confronting and raw and even cruel it got. In this way, P.J. shows his love. It is also why she cannot forget him. He is the first man to really love her, to risk his life for her. In fact to frighten her with her own erotic power. (Campion qtd. in *Holy Smoke!* Press Kit).

Ruth is altered in that she becomes more compassionate, comes to understand her power, and makes contact with her own core values—such as the importance of kindness. The interesting thing about this is that she is not offering relations between the sexes as a binary of powerful/powerless. While Ruth finds this experience frightening, Campion is not portraying this trauma as a negative, but rather as part of the process of understanding. PJ emerges from the experience able to see himself with greater clarity, as Ruth does, and Campion seems to imply that they are now both better able to negotiate the future.

Endnotes

¹ Web sites for women travelling in India warn that Indian women don't ordinarily travel alone and that this can make Western women a curiosity. Touching the opposite sex is also a taboo. See Journeywoman: A Premier Travel Resource for Women—http://www.journeywoman.com/traveltales/her_periodical1.html or Travel Safe India—<http://www.travelsafeindia.com/travel-advisory.html>.

² Female experience is taken to mean an on-going process by which female subjectivity is constructed semiotically and historically—a definition taken from Teresa de Lauretis (1984). She offered experience as meaning effects “resulting from the semiotic interaction of ‘outer world’ and ‘inner world,’ the continuous engagement of self or subject in social reality” (182). Note that the concept of “female experience” as used here is complex and contested and is understood here not as homogenous but rather, from the view there are multitudes of perspectives that might be considered.

³ However, Campion constructs the Barron's panic in relation to Ruth's subscription to a cult as unwarranted. In the mise-en-scene of the film she makes it clear that Ruth is not indoctrinated when she stages her in front of her bedroom mirror back at home in Australia. Ruth places her hands together in religious prayer, but this is a moment of narcissism - what Ruth is most interested in here is in observing her own image as she does this. Moments later she has moved on, and she lights a cigarette, or perhaps a joint. Ruth's own remarks to PJ reflect that it is not a religious experience that she seeks—it is in relation to her selfhood; she admits that she had hoped Baba would help her “grow.”

⁴ Her films are scattered with symbols of faith and superstition, from reading tea leaves in her first film *Sweetie* (1989), through to the Buddha that sits outside Pauline's (Jennifer Jason Leigh) door in her most recent feature, *In the Cut* (2003). Ruth's family, the Barrons, are represented as spiritually barren. I note that the name Ruth comes from the Old Testament of the Holy Bible and is a story of family which emphasizes the theological themes of redemption and kindness (in the film Ruth refers to the Dalai Lama's message of the importance of kindness). Australian cinema through out the 1970s and 80s depicted Australian suburbia as what Simpson has described as a spiritual and cultural desert—something Campion continues with this much later film (see Simpson 24).

⁵ The Barron family as characters also work to construct an ironic voice in the film (a postmodern feature), and Campion herself has described them as a “Greek chorus” (see Hessey, 2000: 8). The dramatic scenes of classical Greek plays were broken up by choral interludes of the chorus. In *Holy Smoke!*, these are “The briefing” (of the family), the capturing her at Emu farm, watching the cult film at the farm, Day three at the pub, and the rescue. The classical Greek chorus had the function of gathering together to comment on what was going on in the play. Thus the fact that Campion uses this description could indicate that she has used them as a way of structuring the story/film. Through images linked to Australian cinema, the family help to point to the incongruous state of things, that things are never what they seem and can suddenly shift ground.

⁶ In early Australian cinema the landscape was represented eternal, monumental, and mythic in films such as Charles Chauvel’s *Jedda* (1954) or Harry Watt’s *The Overlanders* (1956). This was established also with many films of the revival, such as Nicolas Roeg’s *Walkabout* (1971) or Peter Weir’s *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975). There is some evidence that there is a return to the early interest in the landscape in recent cinema. For example, Baz Lurhmann has said of his forthcoming feature *Australia*, (being shot in 2007), that the landscape will be used to amplify the emotion and drama of the story. He refers to *Jedda* and *The Overlanders* as influences (see George 2006).

⁷ While all young women would experience the flowering of youth, in non-Western cultures the experience may differ due to their different material conditions.

⁸ The work in this section is derived from a PhD chapter of twelve thousand words “‘Girlshine’ and *Holy Smoke!*” (see French 2007).

⁹ This is a quote from Campion who outlined that the song was proposed by Kate Winslet. The song itself has been described as a “pop anthem to feminine rage and power” (Bush 249). Although it connects with feminine power, this idea of rage doesn’t appear to be the sense in which it is used here. The chorus: “Cause the love that you gave that we made wasn’t able / to make it enough for you to be open wide” strongly connects to the idea of human connection such as the one that Ruth and PJ make in *Holy Smoke!* However, it could be read as signalling the rage that is to come.

¹⁰ This idea of creativity as central to the evolution of the self is also a prevalent theme in Australian cinema from the mid 1990s, particularly the successful “glitter cycle” films of the decade before—such as *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), *Muriel’s Wedding* (1994), and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994).

¹¹ It is a term from French feminist theory where theorists such as Luce Irigaray (1991) stressed *jouissance* as multiple, ambiguous and fluid (see a discussion of this in Grosz, 1989: 115-116).

¹² Neroni (2004) notes that Campion herself has at times described her films as presenting an experience rather than a story.

¹³ Kaja Silverman (1988) has noted that there are “nodal points” in any director’s work—“the sound, image, scene, place, or action to which [. . .] [the author’s work] repeatedly returns” (218). Silverman’s idea can be directly applied to this film in relation to female *jouissance*, and the repeated motif of urination. Silverman has claimed that a “nodal point” is often a sound, image or a scene that is “marked by some kind of formal ‘excess,’ indicating a psychic condition such as rapture [. . .], fixation [. . .], [or] intoxication” (218). Campion’s film can be understood as part of what Silverman has described as a libidinal economy—a “fantasmatic” cinema of desire (218).

¹⁴ Using the arguments of Irigaray, Grosz (1994) locates the horror of the fluids as being because they are culturally unrepresentable, within prevailing philosophical ontological models. Because of the implicit association of fluids with femininity, maternity, and corporeality, all of which have been subordinated to the masculine, Campion can be understood as inserting the feminine here through her use of fluids (see Grosz, 1994: 195).

¹⁵ Throughout history there has been a historic dualism—a mind/body split where women have been associated with nature, and men with culture. Campion’s film effectively works against such distinctions between the male and female sex.

¹⁶ Many writers have observed this, Klinger for example has referred to extreme versions of “female will” and the confrontation between the “obstreperous female and her dominators” [in *The Piano*] (see Klinger 2006). There is a line of dialogue in *The Piano* which emphasizes this: Stewart tells Baines that he has heard Ada in his head, he points between his eyes and says she is afraid of her will, it is “so strange and strong,” and that she wants him to let her go.

¹⁷ For example, much of the writing on *The Piano* has considered the influence of the gothic, and her film *In the Cut* was screened at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image in 2005 as part of a focus on the “female gothic.” There are numerous publications dealing with the gothic in her films, for example, Davis Hendershot (1998) and Moana Thompson (2000).

¹⁸ For example, New Zealand film has been described as gothic in Smith (2005: 241).

¹⁹ This scene is singled out because of disgust, a reflection of the cultural horror of the materiality of the female body. Kristeva offers that the cost of the clean and proper body emerging is what Kristeva terms abjection. “Abjection is the affect or feeling of anxiety, loathing and disgust that the subject has in encountering certain matter, images and fantasies—the horrible—to which it can respond only with aversion, nausea and distraction” (Longhurst 28).

²⁰ This chapter is not arguing that *all* male critics react negatively to Campion’s work, David Stratton clearly warms to her films, but many of the most indignant reviews are by male critics and this is raised here to offer some discussion of the meaning these men are taking, or not taking, from the films. It is possible that these threatening representations would equally enrage female critics whose worldview is patriarchal. However, this research has not found evidence that female critics have responded in this way.

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